

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
JAMES R. SCHLESINGER
AT THE PENTAGON
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1973
11:00 A.M.

Secretary Schlesinger: I thought that it was possible that you might have some questions that you would like to raise this morning and I'm prepared to take them.

Q: Most of our NATO Allies have apparently taken the position that they're not going to allow the United States to use their airspaces or their facilities for our effort to resupply Israel and we can understand the individual reasons for doing that; it's not a NATO operation. Can you comment on reports that some of our NATO Allies, particularly Turkey, has allowed overflights of Soviet aircraft to resupply the Arabs?

A: I won't comment on the particular issue that you indicate.

Q: Can you repeat that. There is microphone trouble.

A: I think we have had a demonstration in recent days of the importance of readiness. I wish that it were reflected better in this room. The question referred to the suggestion that Turkey had permitted overflights by the Soviet Union. My response was that I would not comment on that particular allegation, but we will investigate all aspects of the responsiveness of various countries in this crisis and will take them into consideration in the future.

Q: Can you tell us what steps the Soviet Union was taking that led us to a military alert?

A: I'll mention a number of them, but there were a plethora of indicators. We were aware that the Soviets had alerted comprehensively their airborne forces. In addition, the Soviet air was stood down, I believe, starting on Monday, and diminished to zero flights on Tuesday. The standing down, along with the alerting with airborne units, plus certain ambiguous developments to which Dr. Kissinger referred yesterday, suggested the possibility of a movement that was unilateral on the part of the Soviet Union and we took the normal precautions under those circumstances; adjusting our DEFCON status.

Q: You said that we took the normal circumstances -- normal adjustments -- it has been suggested and I wonder if you'd comment, that in fact we took extra firm, extra quick reaction, in order to leave no misunderstanding or no possibility of no misunderstanding on the part of the Soviets that the President is still able to act despite his domestic difficulties. Would you comment on that?

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A: I would say that our reaction was timely; that it was not extra quick. Given the indicators that existed, the reaction was taken at the appropriate time. On the question of comprehensiveness or firmness, opinions may differ with regard to that. I think that it's quibbling about details, however. I think that it was important in view of the circumstances that has raised a question or may have raised a question about the ability of the United States to react appropriately, firmly, and quickly, that this certainly scotched whatever myths may have developed with regard to that possibility.

Q: Can you tell us how long the alert is going to go on -- U.S. alert?

A: We have begun to phasedown the alert; CINCSOUTH, the Southern Command, and the Alaskan Command went back to normal DEFCON status at 12:00 o'clock midnight last night. We will be making other adjustments as the circumstances warrant; as the President directs. I would expect that there may be some adjustments in the near term, but it will depend on the circumstances and the views of the President.

Q: Are there any other adjustments today, sir?

A: It is certainly possible that there will be other adjustments made.

Q: Secretary General Brezhnev has said that Soviet representatives have already gone into the war zone. Do we have any indications of what they are, the numbers, types, etc.?

A: The Soviet representatives, I assume, would be associated with the observation teams to which Dr. Kissinger referred yesterday. They would not be Soviet combat forces. The need for small numbers of people and any indications we have suggest that they would be in small numbers.

Q: Wasn't he talking about observers under the U.N. auspices where the Russians evidently are talking about sending representatives to Egypt on request of Sadat?

A: I'm not sure just what the Russian suggestion is. In the judgment of the U.S. Government, there should be no combat forces; major combat forces introduced by any of the permanent members of the Security Council. Now, there may be small numbers of forces, of individuals rather than forces, who would be moving into the combat area or recently the combat area since at the present time all is quiet out there and hopefully they would be associated with the UN controlled observation teams.

Q: Has the airlift been resumed by the Soviet Union?

A: The airlift of the Soviet Union is going on at the present time, much diminished from the prior level.

Q: Mr. Secretary, being an expert in the intelligence field, could you comment on the fact that we are spending \$3 billion a year on this and we

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come up with a big fat zero. Mr. Kissinger has to be waked out of a sound sleep to find out that this happened; he said that the other countries were caught flat-footed also. Could you comment on the efficacy of our intelligence effort in this area?

A: As a general comment, intelligence with regard to the intentions as opposed to capabilities is a very difficult task and one cannot expect to have to bat 1,000 in that area. The purpose of our intelligence expenditures is to improve and substantially, and we believe it has substantially improved, the intelligence available to the United States. We had indications of the movements of forces. In the estimating process, of course, one must make that decision or come to a conclusion whether or not the forces will be utilized. I think that the technical performance, the technical performance of the intelligence agencies cannot be criticized; in fact, it must be highly commended. There are always limitations in the performance, in the estimating process. I think that the technical performance of the intelligence community with regard to the indicators of the possibility of Soviet movement rather than being a flat zero as your question implied was extraordinarily good.

Q: Is it the Administration view now that, because the Administration took a strong stand by declaring this alert, it turned the Russians around?

A: I think that I would refrain from making so generalized a comment. I think that what we would say is that it was necessary to go on alert because of the possibility, the possibility of the movement of forces in a certain region of the world; that the alert was necessitated by that movement of forces. The alert also had the function of demonstrating the strong belief of the United States Government that the movement that was being speculated on would be disadvantageous to the world's peace. Consequently, to that extent that that message was conveyed, I think that this has been a success. But I should stress that the selection of DEFCON III was a normal procedure under those circumstances.

Q: I would like to go into that a little bit. When you used the phrase earlier that the Soviet air was stood down -- I don't understand what that means -- I guess it's a technical military term. What does that mean, the Soviet air was stood down and what are the implications of that?

A: The implications of any standing down are that one must consider the possibility that those equipments are being mobilized for a new purpose.

Q: So the reading here was that the Soviets might be putting themselves in a position to move troops into the Middle East and you wanted to warn them not to do it. Is that correct?

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A: I think the first part of it is the correct reading. The second part is your inference and you're welcome to it. I wouldn't confirm that.

Q: They wouldn't move a lot of airborne troops without some kind of air cover; fighter planes and things like that. Were there indications of that kind of alert as well? Did that tend to soften the concern any or was it just felt that they didn't need that?

A: As one will recognize there has been major air transportation into the Middle East during the last three weeks. All of it has gone through unimpeded. So it was not judged that fighter cover would be a necessity.

Q: Once more for the fourth time. Is there anything that the Russians are now doing that prevents us from calling off the alert now? Why do we have to space out this call-up or alert or stage it out?

A: I think that the answer to that is that we do not know at this stage whether the Soviets have reduced their alert status. We are carefully watching the circumstances and that we are adjusting downward as the circumstances permit. Is that a complete answer to that question?

Q: You say we are carefully watching their alert status. Have they begun to adjust downward?

A: As I indicated a moment ago, it is easier to determine when forces have been put on the alert than when that alert status has been terminated.

Q: What's the status of the American airlift to Israel right now?

A: The American airlift is continuing.

Q: At what stage? Are we still at 20 flights a day?

A: Approximately 20 flights a day. There has been no adjustment of the American airlift. It will continue until such time as sea transportation permits the discontinuation of the airlift. Because of the geographic proximity, Soviet sealift which is now in high gear has taken over in large measure from the airlift.

Q: Nothing that you have said, or Mr. Kissinger said yesterday, has indicated that Soviet nuclear or strategic forces were alerted. Why was it necessary to alert our SAC forces in connection with this Mideast crisis, given the nature of the fighting that has gone in recent days and the type of troops--airborne troops--that were alerted by the Soviets? Why did we have to apparently from what we can tell escalate it into terms of nuclear forces?

A: That is a precautionary measure as I indicated. We chose a DEFCON status that is an intermediate status. Under circumstances that existed at that time one wishes to have one's forces in enhanced readiness posture. This was, of course, not the highest readiness posture. We have had circumstances in the last 15 years in which we have gone into a higher readiness posture than was decided upon the other evening. The Soviet buildup of naval forces, in

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the Mediterranean No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/05/02 : LOC-HAK-187-1-49-0
taking place that might have involved U.S. naval forces, leads one to take precautionary steps involved in putting all U.S. forces that could be involved in a higher state of readiness.

Q: Certain moves were taken during this alert which gave the implication that we were prepared to move paratroopers on our own side to the Middle East. This would indicate also a possible confrontation with paratroopers coming from Russia. Dr. Kissinger indicated that he was not ever thinking of such a confrontation. Why would you then alert the 82nd Airborne for that purpose?

A: A lot is tied up in your word prepared. The increase in the readiness condition of U.S. forces may have been misunderstood by some in recent days. To increase the readiness condition, does not mean that one is prepared to move those forces or even more strongly, commit them to battle. We were, of course, in a position in which, if the circumstances required, we would have been prepared to move the 82nd Airborne, but we were only putting ourselves in a readiness posture and it is important to be in a readiness posture because frequently that removes the necessity of taking actions that might have to be considered if one were not in a readiness posture.

Q: (Inaudible) raise the possibility for the point that you know of that prior to their alert we had sent an additional helicopter carrier with Marines into the Mediterranean and that you had attended a maneuver of the 82nd Airborne down in Fort Bragg. Did they say that those actions by the United States precipitated their alert?

A: Not to my knowledge, but I would indicate that I would not care to comment upon the extent of diplomatic communications, that is a prerogative of Dr. Kissinger. The movement of the Marines was a normal replacement of the Marines in the Mediterranean. It was accelerated by a few days, I don't remember whether it was five days or so. There is a long voyage between here and the Mediterranean. One might regard that as a precautionary measure, but the basic answer to that, I think, is that this was part of a normal replacement. Similar activities have gone on with regard to the Soviet fleet. My visit to Brass Key II to which you referred had been laid on for some months.

Q: Can you give us to some degree the scenario leading up to this alert? The group here says that it was started at 12:00 o'clock (midnight); Dr. Kissinger said 3:00 o'clock (AM). I realize that there's a three hour housekeeping maneuver but did you make the decision by yourself or were you acting on the orders of the President or what?

A: The meeting, and one is a little vague on times, started about 11:00 o'clock (PM); it may have been a little bit later than that.

Q: What meeting is this you are referring to?

A: This was the meeting of the abbreviated National Security Council.

Q: Could you start by telling us who was there?

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A: I think most of the people who were there have been mentioned in their normal statutory capacities. Dr. Kissinger was there, Mr. Colby, Admiral Moorer and myself. The meeting started at approximately 11 o'clock (PM) as I recall it. The decision to notify the Commands of an enhanced readiness status was taken at approximately 11:30 (PM). There's a whole series of decisions that went on between approximately 11:30 (PM) and about 3:30 in the morning; somewhere around 2:00 o'clock (AM) -- I don't remember the precise time -- Admiral Moorer and I returned to the Pentagon in which further action was taken to complete the package of measures that were undertaken at that time. The initial decision was made by myself, however, at approximately 11:30 (PM) and I instructed Admiral Moorer to go ahead with the enhanced readiness condition.

Q: Had you talked with the President at this time?

A: I had not talked with the President at that moment. Dr. Kissinger had, I believe, just spoken with the President. The President was in complete command at all times during the course of that evening.

Q: Was he aware that you had alerted the troops?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Did he approve that?

A: Yes, indeed. As Dr. Kissinger indicated, he approved the entire package about 3:00 o'clock in the morning.

Q: Could you tell us what it was, according to our assessment, that led the Russians to make a move towards moving troops into the Middle East?

A: I would be inclined not to speculate on motives regarding events that did not take place. The Soviets did not move any forces. There were, as I indicated, some actions that increased our wariness and some ambiguous diplomatic signals to which Dr. Kissinger referred, but those events did not take place. You can speculate for yourself with regard to the kinds of discussions that might have been ongoing in the Kremlin during that period of time.

Q: Would you tell us how many Soviet troops were alerted and characterize their state of alert? Also, outside of those troops and the potential for a Soviet airlift of troops, were there any other indicators that caused us to go on our own alert?

A: Yes, sir, there were additional indicators, some of them as I have indicated in the diplomatic area, but there were also additional military indicators in this area.

Q: What were they?

A: I believe I mentioned the enhancement of the Soviet naval forces. They are now up to about 85 ships in the Mediterranean, which is approximately

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double the normal level of the Soviet Mediterranean fleet. In addition,
there were a number of other indicators; military intelligence nature into
which : I shan't go.

Q: What about the number of men involved?

Q: And troops in state of readiness?

A: It was a comprehensive alerting of the Soviet airborne.

Q: Where?

A: I will refrain from answering that at the present time.

Q: How many divisions?

A: I'm not going to go into the Soviet force structure.

Q: It wasn't a comprehensive alert of all their forces--

A: No, the airborne.

Q: There are some reports that roughly 50,000 airborne were alerted,
the Soviets. Is that a rough approximation?

A: As a matter of fact, I'm not sure of the precise number but that
number is in about the right ballpark.

Q: One other question, their (Soviet) two helicopter carriers, did
they go into the Mediterranean?

A: I don't believe so; I can check on that.

Q: Are they still moving around the Black Sea?

A: I've indicated, I think, the full extent of the activities.

Q: Could you tell us why the United States Government viewed the
apparent decision or tentative decision of the Soviets to send forces in as
a peace-keeping measure when they combined that with an appeal to us to send
troops in? I mean, why did we think this was such a dangerous thing? They've
had 15,000 troops there before and they said they were going just to secure
peace.

A: You are dealing with a hypothetical question, once again. I think
that the movement of Soviet forces, the postulated movement of Soviet forces
which is designed, ostensibly designed to restrain the behavior of one of
the nations engaged in military hostilities, with the possible long run
implications of such stationing of forces, is not something that would be
conducive to the development of what is the fundamental objective of U.S.
foreign policy which is a stable and permanent settlement in the Middle
East.

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Q: If you could just clarify, earlier you said I think that the CINCSOUTH was making adjustment. Now why would a NATO command be involved in this type of thing? Did you misspeak?

A: SOUTHCOM.

Q: Both you and Secretary Kissinger have gone to great lengths to indicate that we were not at the brink of war at any time. There are many questions still left unanswered regarding your intelligence estimates as to Russian moves. Is there any way you could help us clear some of this up. It's still ambiguous. I myself am not clear how close we were to actually coming to a confrontation.

A: I think we were very far away from a confrontation--

Q: I couldn't hear the question.

A: The questioner wished to obtain some assurance with regard to the issue of how close we were to a confrontation and I indicated that we were very far away from a confrontation. If the question refers to a military confrontation, under the circumstances, I think that we were taking the actions that were necessary to preclude the development of a military confrontation. Now there were, of course, some elements of confrontation in the sense of political adversaries. They were I think, as Dr. Kissinger indicated the other day, a normal development that occurs between great powers which have considerations in which they are in conflict and also considerations which force them toward a common approach to problems.

I think that this whole episode indicates the limitations in a sense of detente but it also indicates the strength of detente. The fact that Dr. Kissinger, with considerable skill, I must say; a great deal of energy, was able to work out in collaboration with the Soviets the arrangement for two ceasefires, is I think a tribute to the strength of detente -- the communications that existed between the two so-called superpowers. However, of course, there were some elements of conflict but that the overall episode did indicate some of the strengths of detente and some of the advantages to both sides, and to the world at large, in this relaxation of tension. I should underscore that detente refers to mutual relaxation of tension and that detente must be a two-way street, as in the close of this episode it turned out to be.

Q: Was part of the formula, as it existed around 11:00 to 11:30 (PM), that there were Soviet transports enroute and we didn't know whether they had troops, but given all the other circumstances we felt we couldn't take the chance that there were troops aboard those planes?

A: I think that there were mixed reactions and different assessments of the probability. I think that the probability of Soviet forces being enroute was considered by some to be quite low but that the probability might rise was a matter of concern universally.

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Q: (inaudible) thought those planes that were enroute might have troops on them?

A: Yes, indeed, as I indicated that there is a different assessment of probabilities by different individuals. So that when you say that they might have troops aboard, nobody under those circumstances could dismiss that as a possibility no matter how low he placed the probability.

Q: Could you tell us when exactly you first learned that the seven Soviet airborne divisions, or whatever the force may have been, had been placed in an alert status? Wasn't that some time back about the time Kosygin was in Cairo -- quite a way back?

A: It was in an earlier point; I don't remember the precise day. I think that one must recognize that in these assessments it's a pulling together of a number of strands. While the airlift is fully preoccupied, quite obviously, that is of lesser importance than when there is a stand-down. Simultaneously, if there are diplomatic signals that cause wariness that adds to the total picture, but you are quite right.

Q: Is he right, was it several days before that when you first learned about it?

A: I don't remember precisely the number of days or even whether it was days rather than a day, but it had occurred earlier.

Q: Let me jog your memory on that, our colleague Joe Alsop reported that on either the 19th or 20th of this month that an airborne division was alerted.

A: I would not raise any question about the authenticity on the comments of any of your colleagues. I don't remember the precise day. I think that the statement is correct; we can probably check on that for you.

Q: We've had a situation over the past two weeks where our client state got into trouble. We sent in nearly a billion dollars worth of military equipment to help it out. We then got a ceasefire; our client state took advantage of the ceasefire to strengthen its position on the West Bank, to encircle the III Corps. It plunged us into a one-day crisis with our major adversary. What does this all say about our future relations with Israel and specifically, what are we telling Israel now as to what it should do on that Third Army?

A: I think that the answer to your final question will be eminently satisfactory but I cannot give it to you now. With regard to our posture in general, I would not use the term client state, particularly in an exclusive sense. Our purpose has been to restore peace to the area and to maintain a balance so that there can be some stabilization in an area which over the past 25 years has had a notably tragic history. I think that it is evident that in order to have a long-term settlement, that the relationship between Israel and

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her neighbors must be based on something far broader than a military preponderance by the State of Israel. In the working out of that relationship, which we hope has been fostered by the total resolution of the United Nations, that the agreement of the parties to negotiate one with another for the first time in many years; for the first time since 1948 in effect, will be instrumental in bringing about the kinds of stable relationships, or increased stability in those relationships, the United States desires stability in the area; equity for all parties in the area; protection of the security of all parties and consequently, I would tend to adapt the assumptions that underlay your question. The United States has sought to achieve a degree of balance, sometimes the phrase even-handedness is employed with regard to the countries in the area.

Long run stability, however, would not have been achieved if Israel had been inundated after the war started on October 6. The United States delayed deliberately delayed, the start of its resupply operations hoping that a ceasefire could be implemented quickly. Soviet resupply operations started on the 10th of October, if I remember correctly. We hoped that we could discourage that activity on the part of the Soviets and that once again that we could bring an immediate ceasefire. By the morning of the 13th, it was evident, I think, that without resupply there would be extreme difficulty in maintaining a balance. There were some who believed that the existence of the State of Israel was seriously compromised and therefore in order to achieve what is our objective -- a long-run settlement with equity for all parties -- that that action was necessitated on the part of the United States. But the United States, I think, seeks to have in the Middle East a condition of stability and a condition in which the rights of all parties are respected. I hope that many of the nations in the Middle East, without regarding themselves as our clients, regard themselves to a high degree, friends and partners of the United States.

Q: How much equipment have we sent to Israel and how much will we send?

A: At the present time, I think we have delivered approximately 10,000 tons directly.

Q: What is that in terms of dollars?

A: About \$850 million at this stage.

Q: You mean we stopped since last Friday? The White House said it was \$825 million then.

A: You can get the precise number; I think it's about \$850 million.

Q: How much will we deliver in terms of dollars before we stopped the resupply?

A: There is a tendency in these kinds of deliveries for high value items to be delivered at an earlier point in time so that the value per ton tends to decline with the passage of time. I'm sorry I did not answer your full question. What was the rest of the question?

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Q: What will be the total value?

A: The President has asked for a supplemental of 2.2 billion; we do not know whether that is the precise requirement.

Q: Does your remark just now indicate that we have completed delivery of expensive items such as planes, tanks? There'll be no more?

A: No, what my remark suggested was that in the immediate environment after the 13th of October, that certain high value consummables and subsequently certain replacement items were delivered, for the time being there is a reduction in the flow of such items and there is more of a flow of consumables.

Q: Is there a tentative cutoff date for the American airlift? Do you have a date in mind by which you can complete it?

A: For the airlift? I can't give you a precise date, but it could go on. I gave you an imprecise date, at the point that the sealift begins to take over which should be in about two to three weeks time.

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Q: How are we going to create this condition of stability that you talked about in that area if we pump in \$2 billion worth of arms and rearmed the Israelis and Russia pumps in numbers of rubles of arms and rearms the Egyptians and Syrians and equips them to fight all over again? What kind of a fruitful policy is that?

A: I think that it's quite obvious from your question that if that were the sole basis of policy on our part or on the part of the recipient states or the supplier states, that it would be difficult to obtain the kind of longrun settlement to which we have both referred. The settlement must be based upon restraint and balance on the part of the supplier nations, but most fundamentally in the development of a political relationship that can only come from direct negotiations and for the beginning of the appreciation of both parties in the conflict of the requirements that the other party sees which are fundamental and those that can be compromised.

Q: Mr. Secretary, one point about the timing, I hadn't known before our meeting here that you had known for sometime about the Soviet alert of its airborne forces. In the light of that, what specific thing caused this 11 o'clock meeting of the National Security Council; what was the immediate precipitating factor; what had been learned that led to that late night meeting?

A: I think that the direct precipitating cause falls in that area that we have not discussed and I do not wish to go into which relates to ambiguous signals that caused increased wariness. These were not of a military nature.

Q: Are our deliveries of sea and air going to proceed more or less with those of the Russians?

A: Our deliveries are based upon our assessment of what the requirements are to maintain a balance in the area. As you are aware, the American airlift was based upon that premise as was the provision of certain equipments. In tonnage, this is less than the tonnage that was carried initially by the Soviet airlift. In addition, the Soviets are moving about 60,000 tons at the present time by sea. We have moved little by sea ourselves, at this stage. There have been a number of Israeli vessels that have begun to move certain equipments by sea, but I believe that the total movement is about 10,000 tons. So once again it's much smaller.

Q: Mr. Secretary, with respect to Southern and Alaskan Commands, can you say what portion of U.S. forces they represent; does that mean nuclear forces are still on alert?

A: Nuclear forces; let me underscore once again that we have a scaled set of postures ranging from DEFCONFIVE to DEFCONONE. We have chosen an intermediate readiness posture. As a matter of fact for most of the forces concerned, we regard it as a minimum or the lowest degree of readiness that was required by those circumstances. So when you use the phrase alert, all we are referring to is enhanced readiness of a moderate degree. That

has not as yet been changed. As I indicated earlier, we will begin, I think, to make selective adjustments in the readiness posture of all of our forces, including the Strategic Air Command, as the circumstances warrant and in response to the directives of the President.

Q: You've gone through an elaborate discussion of all the military reasons for the alert and then you say, however, none of these reasons was the precipitating cause of the alert and you're not going to tell us what that reason was. I think you owe us an obligation to give us some idea about those ambiguous statements that the other ...

A: I do not think that that would be in the interest of the American public at that time or the question of world peace. As my response to an earlier question indicated, the episode has underscored the strengths of detente, it has also underscored its limitations and consequently in a matter so delicate it would seem to me to be inappropriate at this time to go any further into the kinds of matters to which you refer. I indicated that it was of a non-military nature.

Q: I gather from what you said in answer to your first question that we are disappointed with the behavior or the actions of most of our NATO allies and that this may influence us in things like military aid, etc., in the future. Is that a correct interpretation? You said we would take this into account in planning our future actions.

A: I think that obviously that the circumstances force one, any new set of circumstances forces one to consider established notions; established doctrine. We maintain our forces in Germany, to cite one example, because it provides us with enhanced readiness. The reactions of the foreign ministry of Germany raised some questions about whether they view readiness in the same way that we review readiness and consequently we will have to reflect on that matter.

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